



# ***Iowa Outdoors***

**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
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Iowa's pheasant season opens at 8 a.m., Oct. 28. Shooting hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. The daily bag limit is three rooster pheasants, with a possession limit of 12. The season closes on Jan. 10, 2007.

1. Iowa's Pheasant Season Outlook – by Joe Wilkinson
2. Play it Safe, Pheasant Hunters Urged
3. Super Saturday is Iowa's Sporting Event of the Year – by Lowell Washburn  
[electronic photo available]
4. State Conservation Officers Stressing Safety in Wake of Recent Treestand Accidents

[Editor's note: Hold the Wilkinson story until 10-26]

## **IOWA'S PHEASANT SEASON OUTLOOK**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Iowa's favorite game bird takes center stage this weekend, as 130,000 or more pheasant hunters step into the field.

Hunters should bag 700,000 to 750,000 ringnecks this season. Areas with good habitat will still hold good bird numbers, but overall pheasant numbers are down from last year and long term averages. Iowa's pheasant forecast hinges largely on August roadside counts, which showed a 22 percent downturn in 2006.

"We saw fewer birds overall, but noticed that the hen numbers were down significantly. That is usually an indication we had some winter losses," notes Todd Bogenschutz, upland game biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. Historically, Iowa hunters bagged one million pheasants or more in a season. They have fallen short of that mark in five of the last six years.

Overall, Iowa had normal winter and spring weather, which usually indicates good bird survival and nesting success. Bogenschutz, though, points to 10 to 20 inches of snow and cold weather across much of the state in early December, as the likely culprit.

Statewide, those 215 August counts yielded 27.9 pheasants per 30-mile route; down from 35.8 in 2005. Each of the nine regions showed drops, too; ranging from 50 birds in northwest Iowa (down from 63.5) to 9.7 in south central Iowa (down from 11.1). The better counts were in central (38.5), north central (37.0) and northwest Iowa. In most years, those August results reflect what hunters see during the season. Still, a slim possibility suggests the count was inconsistent, that broods hatched early and were breaking up by August.

“In 1993, the survey said pheasant numbers were down significantly. Yet hunters reported an excellent harvest,” recalls Bogenschutz. “Then, in 1994, the survey said pheasant counts were significantly higher, but hunter harvest was mostly unchanged.” Bogenschutz concedes the answer will come as hunters go through the season.

For most, though, pheasant season means more than just how many birds you see...or shoot. The outdoor tradition keeps friends and family coming back year after year. “I have had just as many calls from hunters as in other years. No one is saying they aren’t coming,” reports DNR district wildlife biologist Bryan Hellyer, in northwest Iowa. “We still have good numbers of birds, with plenty of excellent habitat. There will be lots of people out. We are blessed [in the local area] with a lot of public land. It’s not unusual to see one group leaving it, as another group arrives to hunt it.”

Most Iowa land is in private hands, but hunters have found over the years that they can get on to hunt, if they have patience. “You always hear that Iowa landowners are so friendly,” says Bogenschutz. “Maybe the first week, it’s tough to find access but after that, landowners are pretty good about letting hunters on. I think that’s the biggest attraction to Iowa, historically.” With a 75-day season, Iowa hunters get plenty of opportunities to chase the multi-colored game bird.

In the early part of the season, though, *where* you hunt often depends on the local harvest. Standing crops in many years provide hundreds more acres of cover for pheasants. This year, though, virtually all soybeans have been combined and about 50 percent of the corn is harvested. “Hunters should focus activity around Conservation Reserve Program acres or public land,” suggests Bogenschutz. “Anywhere there is undisturbed grass next to crop land would be a good bet.”

While weather is the most visible short-term factor affecting wildlife, habitat is the *long term* variable. Those Conservation Reserve (CRP) acres have been a major boost to wildlife and outdoor recreation, as well as soil and water conservation. However, those days are numbered for many fields. “The 2007 Farm Bill is up (for consideration by Congress) and CRP is part of it,” notes Bogenschutz, who follows farming trends and potential regulation changes. Since 1990, he has charted a 30 percent drop in potential wildlife habitat (hay, oats, CRP acres) statewide. “We are going to see loss of maybe 100 to 200 *square miles* of it, back into row crops. The future of pheasants in Iowa is going to play big in the next Farm Bill.”

Bogenschutz sees heavy pressure to increase ethanol production in the future. He notes, though, switchgrass and other non-row crop biomass could become a more conservation-friendly key to future ethanol production.

### **Region by Region Pheasant Outlook**

(Pheasants seen per 30 mile route in 2006, and change from 2005)

Statewide, 27.9, down 22.2%  
Northwest, 50.0, down 21.2%  
North central, 37.0, down 13.7%  
Northeast, 18.4, down 27.3%  
West central, 23.9, down 24.5%  
Central, 38.5, down 23.3%  
East central, 22.2, down 26.2%  
Southwest, 20.3, down 29.9%  
South central, 9.7, down 12.7%  
Southeast, 20.0, down 15.5%

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## **PLAY IT SAFE, PHEASANT HUNTERS URGED**

DES MOINES – One of the top weekends for Iowa hunters is about to arrive. The Iowa pheasant hunting season begins at 8 a.m. Saturday with an estimated 130,000 hunters heading to the field.

“The first two weeks of pheasant season have historically been when most hunters enter the pheasant hunting field,” said Rod Slings, recreation safety program supervisor with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “The excitement of a flushing bird, maybe a little competition among hunters or not knowing where everyone is during the hunt are all factors that make these early weeks the most important to follow safe hunting etiquette.”

Slings said hunters should approach opening weekend with a plan that spells out where every hunter in the group will be and each person’s role in the hunt.

“Discussing the hunting plan is the single best thing hunters can do to avoid injuries. Stay in sight of each other. Know the zone of fire and stay within that zone,” he said. “Be sure to communicate – talk to each other during the hunt and wear plenty of blaze orange.”

Some of the more common clothing worn by hunters is tan and brown in color, which closely resembles the Iowa countryside in the fall. Iowa law requires hunters pursuing upland game birds - pheasants, ruffed grouse, quail, Hungarian partridge and

woodcock – to wear at least one article of external clothing with at least 50 percent of its surface area solid blaze orange in color. The requirement can be fulfilled by wearing a hat, cap, vest coat, jacket, sweatshirt, sweater, shirt or coveralls.

“The goal here is to be seen from all directions by other hunters,” said Slings. “The more blaze orange you have on, the less likely you are to be injured by one of your hunting companions.”

The DNR investigated 16 incidents in 2005 that occurred while pheasant hunting. In 2004, five pheasant hunters were injured.

**For more information, contact Slings at 515-281-8652, or your local conservation officer.**

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[Electronic photo available]

## **IOWA PHEASANT SEASON OPENS THIS WEEKEND SUPER SATURDAY IS IOWA'S SPORTING EVENT OF THE YEAR**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Like kids waiting for Christmas, Iowa pheasant hunters have been counting the days. At long last, the wait is all but over. Finally, the biggest day on the outdoor calendar will have arrived. The OPENING DAY of this year's pheasant season begins Saturday!

Any way you slice it, the Iowa pheasant opener is always a big deal. With an estimated 130,000-plus hunters taking to the fields this weekend, no competing activity can stand in its shadow. Opening Day is nothing short of the Sporting Event of the Year. Many ring-neck enthusiasts go so far as to refer to the opener as Iowa's Super Saturday.

The reasons are obvious. The grasslands and stubble fields of Iowa offer World Class pheasant hunting. On average, around one million roosters are bagged in the state each year. South Dakota remains the only state to ever exceed Iowa's harvest, and the two states annually compete for the title of Number One.

There's a good reason why the gaudy, fast flying ring-neck creates such a stir. Of all the experiences the outdoors has to offer, few thrills can compare to the explosive, heart stopping flush of a cackling rooster.

For centuries, the pheasant has reigned as the undisputed King of Game birds. From Gengis Khan, to feudal noblemen, to Teddy Roosevelt, no game bird has remained more popular in more places for a longer period of time than has the regal ringneck.

Pheasants came to North America during the 1700s, and Benjamin Franklin's son-in-law was one of the first Americans to stock the game bird. But this and dozens of other attempts failed to establish a wild population. Then, in 1881, a shipment of wild pheasants from China was released in Oregon's Willamette Valley. The birds took root, and firmly established the species in North America.

Pheasants arrived in Iowa around 1900. In 1925, Iowa opened 13, north central counties to hunting. The first season ran for three days with a daily bag limit of three roosters. Pheasants were so plentiful that farmers in Hancock County ran newspaper ads begging hunters to come and rid their properties of the "nuisance birds". Around 75,000 Iowans participated in that first season.

As cunning as they are colorful, pheasants rarely come easy. Their extensive bag of tricks is both endless and frustrating. Never doing the same thing twice, a rooster will run like crazy or flush wild at one moment and then dig in to let you walk within inches at the next. Those that hold may not lose their nerve until nearly stepped on. As the pheasant suddenly launches, the sound of throbbing wings is combined with the bird's distinctive, raucous clamor. The result is shock and surprise at its finest. To a human hunter, the tactic is totally unnerving. It's why birds that literally flush from between your feet are often as safe as those that blow well beyond range. When all is said and done, no other game bird can so consistently try the patience of both dog and hunter.

As the years and seasons roll by, a young hunter is likely forget exactly when or where he bagged his first squirrel, duck, or rabbit. No hunter ever forgets his very first rooster.

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## **STATE CONSERVATION OFFICERS STRESSING SAFETY IN WAKE OF RECENT TREESTAND ACCIDENTS**

DES MOINES - A string of recent bow hunting accidents has state conservation officials reminding hunters to be careful and diligent in adhering to proper safety precautions.

At least three people have been injured or killed in the last week and a half, all from falling out of a tree stand. One man died from injuries sustained in a fall, another was paralyzed and a third suffered broken bones. One of the hunters was described by friends as an experienced hunter and accomplished climber.

"Accidents don't discriminate between the novice and experienced hunters," said Ron Lane, state conservation officer for Linn and Benton counties, following an accident

last week. “The more you can do to ensure your own safety in the field, the better off you are.”

Some of those precautions include wearing safety harnesses when ascending, descending or sitting in a tree, leaving a detailed account with a friend or family member on where you will be and when you will be home and carrying a cell phone with you in case of emergency.

“Whenever your feet leave the ground, you should be using a fall restraint system, preferably a full body harness,” said Rod Slings, recreational safety coordinator with the DNR. “Just like your treestand, make sure the harness system is approved by the Treestand Manufacturers Association.

“Most importantly, don’t deviate from the plans you left with your friends or family,” said Rod Slings, recreational safety coordinator with the Iowa DNR. “Plan your hunt, and hunt your plan.”

**For more information, contact Alan Foster at 515-281-8874**

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